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**Continued focus on high-demand degree production needed to meet regional employment needs by 2018 and beyond, new HECB report emphasizes**

**OLYMPIA** – A regional analysis of workforce needs recently completed by the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) urges the state and its higher education institutions – public and private – to continue to ramp up degree production in high-demand, high-wage fields in all regions of the state.

The need for degree holders in specific high-wage fields is increasing, despite the recession, and will grow even more in the future — not just in the major population centers, but in virtually every one of the eight regions represented in the study, said John Lederer, HECB associate director of academic affairs, the report’s author.

The *Regional Needs Analysis Report* notes that higher education capacity (especially at the graduate level) is highly concentrated in King County and, to a lesser extent, Spokane and Pullman. Demographic trends, policy, and economic factors will continue to spur the need for additional capacity to produce high-demand degrees outside these population centers, the report notes.

The strongest statewide demand for degree holders continues to be in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (the so-called STEM fields); in the health sciences (nursing, allied health, medicine, biosciences); in specific teaching fields (science and mathematics); and in the areas of business management and accounting, said Lederer. All of these fields require postsecondary education and many require a bachelor’s or graduate degree.

Past reports have indicated Washington is not producing enough high-demand degree holders – especially in the STEM fields – to meet its current and future needs. For every 100 baccalaureate degree holders Washington produces, it imports 76. For every 100 graduate degree holders it produces, it imports 125. This over-reliance on importing talent is not a sustainable long-term strategy to maintain the state’s competitiveness in the global, knowledge-driven economy.

The regional report reinforces conclusions in Washington’s 2008 Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education, which calls for the state to increase baccalaureate and advanced degree production significantly by 2018 (and in the years beyond) to replace retiring baby boomers and meet the growing need for workers in high-demand occupations.

The new HECB report identifies high employer demand occupations based on a forecast of new and replacement job openings between 2010 and 2020 for each of the eight regions. A wide range of additional demographic data is provided about each district.

This information is used by Washington's higher education institutions to help measure the need for proposed new and expanded degree program offerings. The report emphasizes that higher education institutions are in a good position to identify regional employment supply gaps in consultation with local employers and agencies.

The complete report is online at [www.hecb.wa.gov/publications](http://www.hecb.wa.gov/publications).

Some of the report's key findings:

- Student demand for access to higher education will continue to increase in the next 10 years, driven by federal and state policy, goals and incentives. Many 'new' students will come to higher education directly from high school, and more adults in the workforce are expected to enroll – including those who may have stopped out for a while.
- In Washington, a leading 'new economy state,' it is estimated 67 percent of all jobs by 2018 will require some postsecondary education. (Nationwide, 63 percent of jobs will require postsecondary education by 2018). About 20 percent of the Washington jobs will require some college but no degree. About 47 percent will require an associate degree or higher.
- College participation rates vary widely across the state. Higher college participation rates are found in counties where institutions (especially institutions with resident students) are located.
- The forecast predicts wider dispersion of jobs requiring postsecondary education beyond King County. Currently, 46 percent of all jobs in Washington requiring postsecondary education are in King County, but the forecast is for only 41 percent of job openings to occur there.
- The number of job openings for those who receive graduate degrees significantly exceeds Washington's 2009 graduate degree production level, taking into account the many graduate degree recipients who continue to additional education, remain in their same job, leave the labor force, or leave Washington after receiving their degree to take jobs elsewhere.
- Snohomish County has the lowest enrollment capacity with four-year enrollments totaling only a fraction of two-year enrollments in the county. It also has the lowest capacity of any region based on its population, even if nearby institutions in King County are factored in.

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